

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 18, 2004

The Honorable Ann Veneman
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Veneman:

The recent discovery of a form of the avian influenza virus in Delaware may have a potentially devastating effect on the poultry industry in West Virginia. In addition, though the discovered strain has proved harmless to humans, other strains of the virus could present a danger to poultry consumers. Therefore, we urge that you take swift action to isolate and eradicate this virus.

The poultry industry is a critical part of West Virginia's economy. In 2002, poultry accounted for \$107 million in cash receipts for the State. With total export sales of \$18 million in 2002, poultry is West Virginia's top agricultural export. The poultry industry provides jobs on the farms as well as in food processing, storage, and transportation. Not only do the poultry companies directly employ thousands of West Virginians, but hundreds of our state's farmers who supply these companies also rely on the economic health of the industry. Should the avian influenza not be contained and subsequently eradicated in the United States, it could have a catastrophic effect on West Virginia.

In an effort to contain and eradicate the avian influenza, as well as protect poultry consumers and the poultry industry, we urge you to establish a task force at the U.S. Department of Agriculture to assist state and local entities, and the private sector, in regard to this avian influenza outbreak.

Further, we urge you to work with the U.S. Trade Representative to promptly lift bans placed on U.S. poultry by foreign nations.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely yours,


Robert C. Byrd


John D. Rockefeller IV

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